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PLAGUE AND FILARIASIS.

THE POSSIBILITY OF MISTAKING ONE FOR THE OTHER.

Passed Asst. Surg. Creel, representing the Public Health Service in Habana, has invited attention to the fact that in localities where filariasis occurs isolated cases of bubonic plague are likely to be mistaken for this disease. Filariasis is present to some extent in most of the West India Islands, and at the present time both diseases should be borne in mind in cases of enlargement of the lymph glands.

In this connection it is interesting to know that the first case of plague diagnosed in San Juan, P. R., in 1912 was at first believed to be a case of filariasis. The following statement on the subject by Surg. Grubbs shows the need for the utmost care in the differential diagnosis of these two diseases:

At the outbreak of the plague epidemic at San Juan, P. R., in June, 1912, the first case was found in a dying condition, and on autopsy a few hours later the body was badly decomposed and gave no definite signs of plague macroscopically. At the same time another case was found that was considered suspicious, but gave the following symptoms: High temperature; pain and swelling in the right groin, of about 12 hours' duration. On being questioned, he stated that he had frequently had attacks like this before in which he felt badly and had a swelling of the groin, but that this attack was worse than any he had ever had. As the man did not appear very sick, and his mind was entirely clear, I considered it to be a case of filariasis, and we were confident that an examination of his blood that night would reveal the embryos. However, they were not found, and aspiration of the bubo on the following day gave the plague bacillus.

This incident is recalled to show that certain cases of plague may be confused with acute filarial attacks, or vice versa. As in this case, when a diagnosis of filariasis was suggested, although there was a possibility of plague, all the doctors in consultation accepted the clinical diagnosis of filariasis as the most probable.

Also a case believed to be filarial lymphangitis, but simulating bubonic plague, was reported recently by I. Gonzalez Martinez,¹ director of the biological laboratory of the service of sanitation, San Juan, P. R.

¹ Jour. Am. Med. Assn., May 23, 1914, p. 1622.